

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, June 4, 2023

Matthew 28:16-20

‘Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee,
to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.
When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted.
And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.
And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”’

Holy wisdom, holy word.

Thanks be to God.

We find ourselves this morning beginning at the end –
the end of Matthew’s Gospel –
the end of the first half of our liturgical year.

We have made our way through the story of Jesus the Messiah – through the story of our Messiah’s birth and baptism – through the testing in the wilderness and the teaching and healing – through the heartbreaking arrest and crucifixion – and the glorious resurrection. We find ourselves at the end on this Trinity Sunday with six months to go until we begin hearing the story of Jesus yet again – so, what do we do with ourselves during this time? What steps do we take? After all, the second half of the liturgical year is expectantly waiting for us to dance through it.

Through the words of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the eleven disciples know to meet the resurrected Jesus at the mountain in the district of Galilee. A mountain in Galilee. A landscape all too familiar to these students of Jesus. Landscapes often invite memories that our bodies hold to enter our present awareness.

Each time I step into the landscape of a ballet studio, my body sings with memories of sweaty classes and sore muscles; of intense rehearsals, laughter, and tears with childhood friends; and of the overwhelming calm that always held me as I prayed through movement.

I wonder about the landscapes in your lives and what memories they bring forth for you. As the eleven disciples – filled with grief and uncertainty – enter the landscape of Galilee and climb that mountain, their embodied memories begin singing through them – flashing through the image of their mind by image –

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the shadows from which Jesus's ministerial light dawned...
the sea whose waves heard Jesus call Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be fishers of people...
the hills that witnessed Jesus proclaim the gospel and cure every disease and sickness...
the darkness that came over the whole earth before Jesus breathed his last...
Memories swirl together as Jesus' students re-connect with their teacher.

The poet T.S. Eliot wrote, "In my end is my beginning." Inspired by this poetic line, the composer Natalie Sleeth wrote a hymn containing these lyrics, "in our doubt there is believing...from the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery..."

Eleven disciples climb a mountain in Galilee, and upon seeing the resurrected Jesus, they worship and they doubt – they worship and they hesitate – they worship and they waver.

We know this rhythm of worshiping and wavering –
particularly in seasons of endings that make us question what is next –
endings that cause us to move in new ways.

The school year ends, and we shift our schedules.

Jobs end, and we reconfigure our finances and long-term dreams.

Marriages end in divorce or death, and we spin into different ways of being.

These changes leave us feeling disoriented and unsteady – uncertain of where to fix our gaze and anxious about our future.

So, we take the first steps to begin again trusting that in our end is our beginning –
in our past is our future – a future that holds a mystery and is being held *by* Mystery. The Mystery of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who holds all authority in heaven and on earth.

The authority to begin in our endings – to worship even as we hesitate – does not come from within us. The authority to begin in our endings comes from the triune God who directs us and dances with us.

We join hands and forever link ourselves to the Trinity in whose presence we safely belong. In our mountainous transitions, we return to the *strong* and *stable* mountain to which Jesus directs us – and upon which Jesus meets us – to lead us into the holy dance that is our triune God's mission in the world. The mission of making disciples, baptizing, and teaching. The mission of teaching others what Jesus has taught us. Every one of us belongs within this shimmering, sacred, swirling dance.

In a few moments, eleven people will be commissioned for service in Nicaragua. The opening sentences for this commissioning remind *all* of us of our calling to be the church of Jesus Christ – to be a sign in this world of what God intends *for* the world. Healing and restoration. Blessing and forgiveness. Loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. Our calling to

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partake in God's missional dance is demanding and overwhelming. No wonder we approach this calling with both worship and doubt.

And yet – as our feet fumble and our hands tremble – our triune God is with us. “And remember,” Jesus says, “I am with you always to the end of the age.” Jesus says to those eleven disciples and to us – “Note! Pay attention! Look! I companion with y'all every day, through all days, until the completion of the age.”

Jesus companions with us. As we worship and waver, as we baptize and teach, as we leave familiar landscapes and go into all the nations, Jesus companions with us. As we encounter endings and Jesus commissions us to live out the mystery before us, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that baptized us companions with us every day – through all our days – until Christ returns with power and great glory and all is perfected.

Jesus companions with us. As we move into the latter half of the liturgical year that we call ordinary time – as we enter the wild and waste of our setting and dawning days – Jesus companions with us – ever directing us to that strong and stable mountain, so we may remember our mission and begin again. Our God is moving – desiring for us to join the dance that ushers in heaven's kingdom here on earth.

We sometimes miss how this divine dance becomes flesh within us. As I look upon the landscape that is Idlewild, memories of beautiful dancing sing through me.

I see y'all swaying with our triune God as you become swooped up into our Creator's magnificent choreography. I see it in the raw and honest faith statements shared during Session meetings. I see it in the eagerness of members and visitors wanting to know how they can serve. I see it in the Pentecost doves that were gifted to us from the children of Juan G. Hall Presbyterian Church, which then made their way to decorate our own Pentecost potluck tables last Sunday.

I see it in the unexpected provision of passes to the Memphis Union Mission's shelter for our guests who are unhoused. I see it in the expansion of our Care Closet and Room in the Inn.

I see it in the huge smiles and unencumbered joy while marching in the Mid-South Pride Parade. Can you hear it? Can you hear the rhythm of God's heartbeat – the rhythm pulsing within each of us and uniting us as the body of Christ – can you hear God's heartbeat commissioning us to carry forth Jesus's ministry? The Holy Spirit is poured upon us. May we feast and dance together until the end of the age.